

15. Beyond Romanticization of Customary Mechanisms of Conflict Resolution: Notes for Further Discussion

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Matsuda argues that “African Potentials” (for conflict resolution) is a symbolic term, with no fixed substantial entity that can be observed as “potentials”. We must, therefore, be critically aware of romanticizing African traditions by advocating “African Potentials” as mechanisms for conflict resolution. Matsuda argues that there are a variety of customary mechanisms / institutions of conflict resolution in each local or ethnic community, which still survive and work effectively to some extent. However, in the world of modern justice, there is little space for these mechanisms / institutions, and they are thus marginalized. This is why we must carefully explore the concept of “African Potentials” to appreciate the potential competence of these mechanisms / institutions.

At the community level, several different mechanisms within the field of conflict resolution closely overlap. They are: plural indigenous mechanisms such as village courts and traditional reconciliation rituals, national machinery of law, and international investigation. Villagers make selective use of these resolution resources according to convenience. People may thus make a bricolage of available mechanisms as a matter of convenience, altering the content of different mechanisms to conform to local ways and convenience. This viewpoint places the highest priority on maintaining local/community social systems. This “life-pragmatic approach” is useful when considering “African Potentials”.